

OSTEOPOROSIS

Osteoporosis is called the “silent disease” because bone is lost with no signs. You may not know that you have osteoporosis until a strain, bump or fall causes a bone to break.

Osteoporosis is a very common disease that causes bones to become weak. Bone weakness can lead to fractures of the spine, hip and wrist from simple falls or even a sneeze or a cough! In the United States, 10 million people have osteoporosis. Millions more have low bone mass (called osteopenia), placing them at risk for osteoporosis and broken bones.

Osteoporosis can strike at any age, but it is most common in older women. Eighty percent of the people in the United States with osteoporosis are women. One out of every two women and one in four men over age 50 will break a bone in their lifetime due to osteoporosis.

Bone is a living tissue. It is mostly made of collagen, a protein that provides a soft framework and calcium phosphate, a mineral that hardens the framework. Our bones are continually replenished throughout life. The body deposits new bone and removes old bone. During childhood, more new bone is formed than old bone removed. The body's bone is the most dense and strong around age 30. After age 30, the body starts removing more old bone than forming new bone!

Many risk factors can lead to bone loss and osteoporosis. Some of these things you cannot change and others you can. Risk factors you cannot change include:

1. Gender: women get osteoporosis more often than men.
2. Age: the older you are, the greater your risk of osteoporosis.
3. Body size: small, thin women are at greater risk.
4. Ethnicity: white and Asian women are at highest risk. Black and Hispanic women have a lower risk.
5. Family history: osteoporosis tends to run in families

Other risk factors are: sex hormones, anorexia nervosa, calcium and vitamin D intake, medication use, activity level, smoking and drinking alcohol.

Exercise helps your bones grow stronger. Like muscle, bone is living tissue that responds to exercise by becoming stronger. The best exercise for your bones is the weight-bearing kind, which forces you to work against gravity. To increase bone strength, you can: walk, hike, jog, climb stairs, lift weights, play tennis and dance. Ask your doctor which activities are safe for you. The optimal goal is at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days, preferably daily.

How is Osteoporosis Diagnosed?

A bone mineral density test (called a DXA) is the best way to check your bone health.

This test can:

- A. Diagnose osteoporosis.
- B. Check bone strength.
- C. See if treatments are making the bones stronger.

People of all ages can prevent osteoporosis through healthy life habits, including:

- A healthy, balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D
- Staying active
- Not smoking
- Not drinking excessively

As people become older and their bones weaken, preventing falls is essential to avoid accidents that can be debilitating. People who develop osteoporosis should not lift, push, or pull heavy objects. They must be careful not to trip on thick carpet or throw rugs, or fall on slippery surfaces.

Osteoporosis is a very common condition that can be prevented by good nutrition, and a healthy lifestyle. Many medications are now available to help prevent or treat osteoporosis after a woman reaches menopause. Calcium and vitamin supplements are also available and inexpensive. Avoiding falls, tripping and bumping into objects can prevent fractures and allow people with osteoporosis to live very healthy and productive lives.